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INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 000406

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/CM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/04/2019

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM HK](#)

SUBJECT: LEAGUE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS: TRIPPING ON THEIR OWN  
BANANA PEEL?

REF: (A) HONG KONG 383 (B) 08 HONG KONG 1933

Classified By: Consul General Joe Donovan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The banana-throwing antics of Hong Kong's League of Social Democrats (LSD) may have finally crossed the line, as LSD legislators have encountered widespread opprobrium for their disruption of Financial Secretary John Tsang's budget address. Unlike their antics during the Chief Executive's October Policy Address (ref B), the LSD's physical confrontation of Financial Secretary John Tsang during his February 25 budget address was seen by many to border on criminal assault. Thirty pro-establishment legislators signed a formal statement of condemnation February 25, and even the LSD's pan-democratic allies felt the need to declare the LSD out of line. For their part, the LSD denies that their actions were violent, have criticized their democratic colleagues for "shooting them in the back" while they stand on the "front line of democracy", and says the public will "get used" to their stunts in the Legislative Council. The LSD has traditionally enjoyed a small but solid base of support sufficient to win elections. While no one other than the LSD themselves have come out in favor of their actions, there is no polling data yet to indicate the general public's verdict. End summary.

12. (C) Comment: The LSD are more of a problem for their allies than for their opponents. For the government and pro-Beijing forces, the LSD provide a vivid illustration they can use to decry the threat of Hong Kong descending into "Taiwan politics" (which, for all Hong Kong-born Ma Ying-jeou's popularity here, still carries a negative connotation even among democrats). It also allows the government to continue to argue the pan-democrats are not amenable to reason. In addition to needing every vote they can get, the mainstream pan-democrats fear the "swift boat" tactics the LSD has been all too ready to employ against any in the camp seemingly ready to compromise on the absolute standard of "universal suffrage now." The Civic Party (CP) still believes "Mad Dog" Wong's attacks on CP Legislative Council (LegCo) candidate Claudia Mo in Kowloon West cost her a seat. At the same time, they recognize the LSD's antics alienate the generally pragmatic Hong Kong public. Thus, they face the difficult task of distancing themselves from the LSD's tactics without appearing to distance themselves from democratic goals, or seeming to collude with the pro-Beijing camp against their democratic allies. End comment.

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Over the Line  
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13. (SBU) Media covered widely the latest spectacle staged by the radical League of Social Democrats (LSD) -- Wong "Mad Dog" Yuk-man, Leung "Long Hair" Kwok-hung and Albert "Big Tall" Chan -- during Financial Secretary John Tsang's presentation of the budget bill to LegCo February 25. The

action began with Wong confronting Tsang at the podium, hurling his documents and water glass to the floor. Leung then chose to smash a rice bowl in front of Tsang (a reference to livelihood issues) and to tear up Tsang's documents. As with their previous outbursts, LegCo President Jasper Tsang had the three removed from the chamber. While no one has reported that any of the LSD actually struck Tsang, media report Leung also threw a book and toy bananas at Tsang as he was being led out. Civic Party legislator and barrister Tanya Chan ventured to us that the LSD's actions might constitute criminal assault.

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HKSARG: Increasingly Intimidating Acts  
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¶4. (SBU) In remarks to the media and in a formal letter to LegCo President Jasper Tsang, Chief Secretary Henry Tang expressed dismay at the LSD's "unruly behavior", which he found detrimental to executive-legislature relations and at odds with the importance of the budget to the Hong Kong people. "I feel obliged to register again, indeed for the third time within this (2008-9 LegCo) session, the Administration's deep regret over such incidents." (Note: In addition to their confrontations of the Chief Executive (ref B) and Financial Secretary Tsang, the LSD has also tried to shout down Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Stephen Lam. End note.) Tang told the press he hoped for "immediate, decisive and effective measures" to prevent a recurrence. Media quoted Executive Council Convenor C.Y. Leung as terming the LSD's actions "violent conduct" and "deserving of condemnation." That said, the government has

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not made the issue a law enforcement matter, apparently preferring (for now) to leave LegCo to address the matter through its own rules process.

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Pro-Government Camp: Crude Disruption  
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¶5. (SBU) In a February 25 statement, the pro-government camp "condemned" the LSD's actions as a "crude disruption" of the reading of the budget bill and "the normal work of the legislature." The statement was signed by every legislator from the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong (excluding LegCo President Jasper Tsang), the pro-Beijing Federation of Trade Unions, the Liberal Party, and every independent not identified with the pan-democrats. Interestingly, the statement chose not to characterize the acts as "violent". However, a number of pro-government legislators have been quoted in the press as considering revisions to the LegCo house rules to grant the LegCo President additional powers beyond his current authority to eject disruptive legislators from the remainder of that day's session. This idea has also been mooted in recent days on the editorial pages of the South China Morning Post and Ming Pao and by pro-democratic columnists Chris Yeung and Frank Ching. LegCo President Jasper Tsang has since told the media he does not see that actions to date justify the permanent expulsion of any legislator.

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Pan-Democrats: Dissatisfaction and Extreme Regret  
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¶6. (C) The pan-democrats declined to sign the pro-government parties' statement. Instead, the Democratic Party (DPHK) and Civic Party (CP) jointly issued a statement February 27, which expressed "dissatisfaction and extreme regret" at the LSD's actions. Unlike the pro-government camp, the DPHK and CP did not shy away from terming the LSD's actions as "violence". DPHK Chairman Albert Ho and CP Party Leader Audrey Eu also criticized the LSD in remarks to the press. That said, although their statement called for discussions in

the LegCo Rules Committee on this issue, the democrats hedged by saying they intended a general discussion, rather than to look specifically at adding additional punitive powers to the authority of the LegCo President.

17. (C) CP legislator and barrister Tanya Chan told us February 25 that she felt the LSD's outburst was a disservice not only to LegCo but also to the people of Hong Kong, and believed the LegCo President should have broken up the ction earlier. She suggested Leung's actions in articular might constitute criminal assault. Ata lunch on February 27 (ref A), DPHK Chairman Ho agreed that the LSD's antcs hurt the pan-democrat's credibility, and toldthe Consul General his party would speak out. Wile acknowledging that the LSD's theatrics give mmunition to thoseclaiming the government and is LegCo allies "cannot work" with the democrats, th DPHK also notes that the LSD enjoys solid suppot from about ten percent of the Hong Kong electoate, enough mandate to keep them in office.

18. (C) Among pan-democrats not joining the condemnation of the LSD, Neighborhood and Workers Service Center legislator Leung Yiu-cheung was quoted in the press as warning the other democrats that granting additional powers to the LegCo president might give the government greater ability to muzzle the democrats. Civic Act-up legislator Cyd Ho does not herself condone violence, but argued that the LSD's actions were understandable given Hong Kong's unfair and undemocratic system. She also contended that both the LSD by their actions and the DPHK and CP in their response were trying to mobilize their political bases.

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LSD: Shot in the Back  
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19. (C) The LSD remains defiant, arguing their actions are justified by the unfair system of governance in Hong Kong. A March 2 statement posted on the LSD website proclaims that the LSD is merely standing by their campaign slogan that "without protest, there cannot be change." While they stand at "the front line of democracy", their pan-democratic colleagues, by their statement, have "shot (the LSD) in the back." They deny that their actions were violent, mocking their democratic critics by asking, "if there was a violent incident in LegCo, how come no one among the fifty-seven other legislators and the government officials present dared to report it to the police?" Proclaiming they do no fear to

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stand alone, they nevertheless warned their democratic allies that by blackening the LSD's name and siding with the pro-government forces, they would "sow what they reaped" by themselves ending up the target of a more repressive system.

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Verdict of the Public  
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110. (C) As noted, media coverage has been factual and opinion journalism has been uniformly negative regarding the LSD's outburst. While most pundits expect the Hong Kong people will judge the LSD to have gone too far, there is not yet any polling data to map out where the public stands. In addition, Hong Kong's unusual election system means that a loyal minority of ten percent is potentially enough for the LSD to win seats in several constituencies. As long as the LSD plays to that margin, and that margin continues to approve of their actions, they may be able to hang on to several seats.

DONOVAN